

# ★ ★ ★ FORT LARAMIE

NATIONAL MONUMENT ★ *Wyoming*





*Ruins of the Post Hospital.*

## THE COVER

### *Contents*

	<i>Page</i>
The Old Guardhouse . . . . .	Cover
Fur-Trading Era . . . . .	4
Fort Laramie as a Pioneer Post . . . . .	7
Fort Laramie as a Military Post . . . . .	12
Fort Laramie Today . . . . .	14
Allied Sites of Interest . . . . .	15

Entitled "Fort Laramie or Sublettes Fort near the Nebraska, or Platte River," the sketch reproduced here was originally made in watercolor by Alfred Miller (1810-74), an American artist who accompanied the expedition of Sir William Drummond Stewart to the West in 1837 and 1838. The scene depicted shows a colorful Indian encampment in front of the palisades and blockhouses of old Fort Laramie. The sketch is from the Alfred Miller Collection in the possession of Mrs. Clyde Porter, Kansas City, Mo., and reproduced with her permission.



1942

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

HAROLD L. ICKES, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE · NEWTON B. DRURY, *Director*



# Fort Laramie National Monument

NO HISTORIC SITE in the Rocky Mountain region is more important than that of Fort Laramie. Its story as fur-trading station and as military post epitomizes the history of the successive stages by which the immense territory reaching from the Missouri River to the Pacific coast was opened to settlement and occupied by adventurous and freedom-loving American and European pioneers seeking to build new and better homes for themselves and their children on the virgin land of the West.

Located on the rolling plains of the southeastern part of the present Wyoming, Fort Laramie was founded in 1834 during the mighty days of Rocky Mountain fur trapping and trading, and saw this typically pioneer business wax and decline. By its gates, facing upon the Oregon Trail, passed the first Protestant missionaries and the first home seekers on their way to the Oregon country to build a new America on the far-off shores of the Pacific. Mormons seeking to found a new Zion in the promised land of Utah, forty-niners hoping that California was El Dorado, prospectors bound for the mines of Montana and Idaho, and hosts of

others seeking adventure or a better and more fruitful life, found protection and supplies at Fort Laramie, the great way station on the road to the West. In its last decades it was a center for negotiations with the northern plains Indians, and a base for military operations which drove the Indians from their old homes. It served also as a station and a protection for the Pony Express, the overland stage, and the mail service.

In the 1880's, with the final subjugation of the plains Indians and with the coming of the railroad as the chief means of travel, Fort Laramie lost its usefulness as a military post and was abandoned in 1890. This famous post, however, will long be remembered for the notable part it played in the history of western settlement. The men of varied origins who passed it on their westward trek or who lived there as traders or soldiers were imbued with the democratic faith and helped to establish that faith in the vast territory west of the Missouri. To them, to their achievements, to their democratic ideals, and to the post itself, Fort Laramie National Monument has been created as a memorial.

*A sketch of Fort Laramie in 1842.*



## *Fur-Trading Era*

NOT LONG AFTER the Louisiana Purchase, Americans began to exploit the lucrative fur resources of the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains. Late in 1812, Robert Stuart, carrying dispatches for John Jacob Astor eastward from Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River, reached the neighborhood of the future Fort Laramie and subsequently gave what is apparently the first written description of the region. Ten years later the Rocky Mountain Fur Co. was launched to open up the rich central Rocky Mountain region. This company, first to exploit the Fort Laramie region, opened up the country around the sources of the Platte, Green, Yellowstone, and Snake Rivers, and gave the world its first real information concerning the character and the potentialities of this vast territory. Its trappers and traders discovered Great Salt Lake and were the first to go from that point southwesterly to southern California and westerly across the barren lands of Utah and Nevada to the Sierras and California. The most famous explorers of the Far West, the Rocky Mountain Fur Co. men composed the most im-

portant group of guides for the Federal Government in its first surveys of the central Rockies.

Notable though its pioneering achievements were, the Rocky Mountain Fur Co. lacked the financial resources and marketing facilities of the larger fur companies. Competition was increasingly keen and unscrupulous; and both the price and the demand for beaver skins, principal object of trapping, gradually declined as silk and other hats began to replace the once fashionable beaver. Finally, in 1831, Astor's powerful American Fur Co. began to operate in the central Rockies and to diminish still further the business of its small competitors. Three years later, the Rocky Mountain Fur Co., unable to meet these adverse conditions, was dissolved.

That same year, 1834, saw the establishment of Fort Laramie, the product of the foresight of William L. Sublette and Robert Campbell, two partners with more than a decade of experience as trappers, traders, and entrepreneurs. They realized that the declining demand for beaver skins and the growing market for buffalo pelts would soon force the abandonment of the annual mountain rendezvous for the exchange of goods and beaver skins. For, while white trappers largely procured the beaver skins, they did not

*Another view of the Old Guard House.*







then generally compete with the Indians in securing and tanning buffalo hides, which were widely used as lap robes and overcoats, the demand for which was constantly mounting. As shrewd business men, Sublette and Campbell perceived that under these circumstances a permanent trading post must necessarily replace the moving rendezvous. Indians, not white men, bulky buffalo pelts, not small beaver skins, must be dealt with, and a walled post was consequently needed for the safe storage of trade supplies and buffalo hides.

The junction of the Laramie and the Platte Rivers was in the buffalo country of the Sioux and had long been used for trade with the Indians. Here, therefore, early in the summer of 1834, a trading station was established. Rectangular in form, the post was enclosed by pickets about 15 feet high. Three blockhouses, two at diagonal corners and one over the front gate, defended the station. The storage rooms and the quarters for the men were placed against the inside of the stockade. Named Fort William in honor of Sublette, the post was shortly sold to a fur company headed by Thomas Fitzpatrick, regarded by his fellows as the outstanding "mountain man." Bought in September 1836 by the American Fur Co., Fort William was rebuilt of adobe about 5 years later when its logs began to decay, and was christened Fort John. Popularly, however, the post was known as Fort Laramie, the name given

*FORT LARAMIE IN 1863.—From an early drawing made by Bugler C. Moellman, Co. G, Eleventh Ohio Cavalry. Laramie River in foreground. Picket fence in right rear is enclosure for the old cemetery, where the new hospital was built when the old one was dismantled. This is to be seen just back of the three-gabled building (the post sutler's home). The cavalry stables are to the extreme right center. In the center of the picture, and to the extreme rear (low roofs and tops of windows just showing) is the sutler's store. All of the roofs at this date were made of dirt. "Bedlam" stands at the right of the flagstaff, directly behind the four cannon. Laramie Peak in the background.*

to the river and the surrounding region in memory of Jacques Laramé (or La Ramie), a trapper reported to have been killed about 1821 by Indians on the banks of the stream now known as the Laramie River.

During its heyday as a fur trading post in the 1830's and the early 1840's, Fort Laramie was the center of the vast fur country of the Rockies. In the spring, goods and supplies for trading were brought from Council Bluffs. The arrival of the supply caravan was the great occurrence of the year for the men of the post shut off from contact with civilization. It broke the winter-long monotony; eastern newspapers told of the happenings in the vast outside world; and eagerly awaited letters brought word of relatives and old friends. In the spring, too, the company trappers, equipped with beaver traps, set out to make the year's catch. Meanwhile, the pack mules proceeded to the annual summer rendezvous in the mountains, the outstanding feature of fur trading in the Rockies, where



*The adobe sutler's store as it exists today.*

white traders met hundreds of Indians with skins and furs which they traded for gaudy finery, beads, knives, combs, mirrors, vermilion, tobacco, and firewater. At the rendezvous, too, the independent trappers' supplies were renewed for the coming year. When the rendezvous with its keen trading, boisterous merriment, reckless gambling, and hard drinking was over, the furs secured by trade and brought in by American Fur Co. employees were packed on mules and taken to Fort Laramie to become part of the trading stock.

Beaver skins were obtained also through company traders sent out from the fort to visit Indian bands as far away as northern Montana. Supplied usually with alcohol, tobacco, vermilion, and the other articles of barter, these traders, in the post's early years, still brought back significant additions to the beaver skin stocks. By 1840, however, the increasing scarcity of beavers and the declining demand for beaver pelts greatly diminished the importance of the lone trader and, even more significantly, brought about the aban-

donment of the annual rendezvous. These developments, however, did not immediately lessen the importance of permanent stations like Fort Laramie. For the trade in buffalo robes continued to mount, and Indians could be depended upon to bring these to the post. Indeed, Indians came to regard Fort Laramie as the great trading post of the central Rockies.

In and around the fort at most times was found a colorful assemblage of American traders and trappers, Indians, French-Canadians, and half-breeds. Late in the summer and in the fall, bands of Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes, seeking to trade with white men, camped near the post in large numbers. At all seasons of the year, however, clusters of Indian lodges were to be seen. Unscrupulous and unrestrained competition led to use of diluted alcohol as the most common article of trade. Eagerly sought by the Indian, alcohol was given to him at exorbitant prices in terms of skins and furs. Incidents were known of Indians who even exchanged everything they



possessed—furs, lodge, horses—for a keg of alcohol. The sale of alcohol became so prevalent and so destructive in its effect on the Indian that in the early 1840's the American Fur Co. attempted to secure stringent enforcement of the Federal laws against selling intoxicating beverages to the Indians. But these efforts were only partly successful, and alcohol continued to exert a baleful influence on both the Indian and the fur trade.

In 1845 it was estimated that 9,000 buffalo robes were sent out from Fort Laramie in a single shipment, and that 2,000 pounds of beaver skins had been collected the previous year. Occasionally, bullboats, flatboats made of buffalo hide, were sent down the North Platte River with cargoes of robes and skins, but only for a short season in the spring was the river deep enough for navigation. It was much safer to send the robes and skins across country to Fort Pierre on the Missouri River, and then by boat to St. Louis, the great emporium of the American fur trade. In time, a regular wagon road was established between Forts Laramie and Pierre.

With the establishment by Jim Bridger, the best known of the mountain men, in 1843 of the famous fort in southwestern Wyoming which is called by his name, the trading activities of Fort Laramie were given greater scope. Bridger conducted much of his trade through Fort Laramie, sending sea shells and other articles procured in California to the post, in addition to beaver pelts and deer skins.

After 1845 the enormous increase in overland emigration and travel to the Pacific coast brought a new source of profit in the supplies sold to emigrants who made Fort Laramie their first stop for rest and provisioning. After that year, fur-trading activities became relatively much less important, and with the sale of the post to the United States Government in 1849 its day as a center of the fur trade passed.

The fur-trading era was an exciting, adventurous, and important phase of frontier history. It is, therefore, only fitting that Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, William Sublette, and the other trappers and traders of the Rocky Mountain West should be commemorated as men whose courage, initiative, and determination made possible the exploration of much of the Far West and so both stimulated and facilitated the settlement of home-seekers to the vast trans-Missouri country.

## *Fort Laramie as a Pioneer Post*

AS EARLY AS 1818, the rich potentialities of the comparatively unknown Oregon country were called to the attention of Easterners by Hall J. Kelley, a Massachusetts school teacher who became an enthusiastic advocate of emigration to the Oregon region through his study of the reports of Lewis and Clark. In the years that followed, the tales of trappers, explorers, and missionaries promoted curiosity about the almost untouched lands of the Pacific coast, and by the end of the 1830's, widespread interest was manifested in the new country. The missionary activities of the Rev. Jason Lee, Dr. Marcus Whitman, and the Rev. H. H. Spalding, the pioneer Protestant missionaries of the Oregon country, all of whom accompanied the supply caravans to Fort Laramie and wrote brief descriptions of it, were particularly notable in arousing public interest.

The hard times that followed the panic of 1837, and belief in the greater opportunities afforded by the virgin soil of the Pacific coast, brought about the emigration in 1841 of the first organized band of approximately 80 home seekers bound for California and the Oregon country. This was the first of many annual wagon trains that went westward along the Oregon Trail past Fort Laramie. The first center of white habitation for hundreds of miles, the fort was a welcome sight to weary emigrants who had been on the treeless plains for weeks. Here they paused, repaired their outfits, replenished their supplies, gave their horses and cattle a much-needed rest, and obtained the latest information on the condition of the route before leaving the plains and proceeding into the mountainous territory where, before 1850, supplies could not usually be secured until the Oregon country was reached. One writer describes Fort Laramie as furnishing "important assistance and protection to hundreds of our people on their way to Oregon and California. Some of them had lost their horses and oxen, their wagons broke down, and others again were sick, unable to travel, some had broken limbs and some entirely destitute of anything like provisions, all of these unfortunate individuals met with instant relief."

In 1843, the first great migration passed Fort Laramie. Whole families migrated, a census of the annual caravan showing 260 men, 130 women, and 610 children. For the next quarter of a century annual caravans and scores of independent



*Fort*

companies took tens of thousands of emigrants westward to build new States in the Rocky Mountain country and on the Pacific coast. Not until the Union Pacific Railroad was constructed in the 1860's did the Oregon Trail, the great thoroughfare of the covered wagon to the West, lose its outstanding significance.

The year 1847 witnessed the emigration of a new and, to most Americans, extremely curious element, the Mormons. Driven out of Nauvoo, Ill., by persecution, as they had been hounded previously out of Missouri, the first band of Mormons, led by vigorous Brigham Young, paused at Fort Laramie on their way to found a settlement in Salt Lake Valley, on whose virgin soil they hoped at last to find freedom from intolerance.

The greatest emigration, however, came in 1849, when 35,000 or more gold seekers followed the trail to California in a wild rush to gain quick and easy wealth. Singly, in small groups, in large parties, the wagons and pack animals paused at Fort Laramie for rest and supplies, but soon were once more on the road to the Golden West.

The following year it was estimated that even more emigrants were on the trail, about 50,000 being the number usually given. So vast was the tide of emigration that facilities for repair work at Fort Laramie were inadequate for the needs of the emigrants. The military authorities, who were now in charge of the fort, particularly noted the urgent need for blacksmith and wagon makers' shops. In 1851, the emigration declined to about

*A view*







in 1870.

20,000, but rose again in 1852 to about 40,000. In the following years, numbers fluctuated greatly, emigration to California and Oregon rapidly diminishing after the peak was reached in 1850.

For some years, however, the number of Mormons bound for Utah remained fairly constant, partly because of the aid given poor emigrants from Europe and the Eastern States by the Perpetual Emigration Fund of the Church of Latter Day Saints. In 1856, the Mormons began and continued for several years to use modest handcarts on a large scale in place of teams. This unusual innovation was necessitated by the inability of the Mormon Church any longer to buy wagons and horses for the use of emigrants. Carts not unlike those of present-day street sweepers were used.

Supplies and utensils were loaded on the handcarts, one of which was assigned to four or five persons who made the long trip on foot, pushing and pulling the carts. The hardships suffered by emigrant parties are demonstrated in the sufferings of the last two handcart companies which crossed the plains in 1856. Inadvisedly starting the long trip across the plains late in July with deficient supplies, they were delayed by the necessity of repairing their carts. At Fort Laramie they replenished their provisions, but there was still not enough, and rationing was instituted. Cold weather and snow overtook them, but clothing was insufficient, and, in their fatigued and weakened condition, about 200 persons of the more than 1,000 died. Some of the dead were

amie today.





*"Old Bedlam" in 1874. The wing at the left no longer exists.*

*Shown here Are four views of "Old Bedlam," historic frame structure at Fort Laramie, which has been used at various times as*

*officers' quarters, post headquarters, and social center. It is the sole survival of the fort's original buildings.*

*A view of the structure about 1902*







*The building in 1938, prior to the commencement of restoration.*

*"Old Bedlam" as it now appears, in the process of restoration by the National Park Service.*



buried in the snow, as the ground was frozen too hard to dig.

The rapid growth of American settlement in California, Oregon, and Utah led to the establishment in 1850 of mail service between Independence, Mo., and Salt Lake City, Utah. During most of the 1850's, Fort Laramie was the division point, the mail stages from each end of the line being scheduled to meet here on the 15th of the month. Actually, however, regular schedules were difficult to maintain, and this was especially true in the winter on account of uncertain weather. In connection with the mail service, express and passengers were usually carried also. Not until the Pony Express was established in the spring of 1860 was there a truly fast mail service in the vast undeveloped West. The product partly of the vision and efforts of William H. Russell, of the great freighting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell, and of Senator W. M. Gwin, of California, and partly of the organizing ability of Alexander Majors, the Pony Express used fleet horses ridden by light men or boys, who changed steeds at relay stations 65 to 100 miles apart. During 1860 and 1861, the arrival and departure of the riders are said to have been the most exciting events at Fort Laramie. The Pony Express emphasized quick service and was fairly successful in bringing letters across the plains and mountains from St. Joseph, Mo., to Sacramento, Calif., in about 13 days, which, in 1860, seemed the height of speed. In spite of its outstanding achievements, the Pony Express could not successfully compete with the overland telegraph finished in the fall of 1861 and was abandoned at that time.

In the late 1850's, freight transportation by wagon became almost as conspicuous a feature of the Oregon Trail as the westbound emigration. The establishment of military posts in the West and the presence of hundreds and, at times, thousands of soldiers involved the transportation of great quantities of supplies. In 1858, a year of unusual activity, Russell, Majors, and Waddell alone used 3,500 wagons, 4,000 men, and 40,000 oxen. For freighting, as for travel, Fort Laramie was the great outpost, a base of operations being maintained here which supplied and repaired the freight wagons as they arrived.

After 1860, Fort Laramie was primarily interesting as a military post. Emigrants and travelers still came and went; freight wagons still rolled by;

and the fort remained a supply center. But relatively, Fort Laramie became less important as a pioneer post. The building of the Union Pacific and the other transcontinental railroads, with their subsidiary lines, diverted travel and transportation, and further diminished the significance of the post. Finally, in the 1880's, it ceased to have significance to the emigrant, the traveler, and the freighter.

### *Fort Laramie as a Military Post*

By 1848 THE VAST INCREASE in travel over the Oregon Trail had clearly shown the need for military posts as supply centers and sources of protection for the advancing white civilization from hostile Indians who were now thoroughly alarmed by the almost continual stream of westbound caravans and highly incensed by the disappearance of grass and game from the Oregon Trail and its vicinity. Emigrants and travelers, on their part, charged the Indians with thievery and beggary. Late in the year, Fort Kearny was established near Grand Island on the Platte River in what is now Nebraska. The following spring Fort Laramie was bought by the United States and the erection of buildings was started. Among these was the building which came to be known as Old Bedlam, the officers' quarters, scene of many gala affairs and the most famous structure at the old post.

In the summer of 1851, probably the largest assembly of Indians in the history of the West gathered at Fort Laramie to meet representatives of the United States in an attempt to settle the new problems and avoid future trouble. More than 9,000 Indians of the northern and central plains and foothills assembled. Owing to the better forage about Horse Creek, 35 miles east of the fort, the meeting was moved to that place, where conversations continued for over a week. A treaty was then signed whereby the Indians agreed not to molest wagon trains and to permit the stationing of troops along the trail, while the Government was to pay the Indians \$50,000 annually in goods, and to set aside a reservation comprising eastern Wyoming, half of western Nebraska, half of Colorado, and parts of Kansas and South Dakota.

Comparative peace reigned for 3 years, but in August 1854, this was broken by the "Grattan Incident." A Mormon emigrant charged that a nearby band of Sioux had stolen and killed one of his cows. The commander at Fort Laramie



was informed of the incident by a chief of the Indian band who reported that the guilty man had been reprimanded. In order to arrest the offending Indian, Lieutenant Grattan, just out of West Point, was sent with a detail of 30 men to the Sioux camp. The Indians, however, refused to surrender the guilty man, a dispute followed, and finally the soldiers fired their muskets and their two howitzers. But their aim was high, and the Sioux swarmed around the soldiers and killed all but one of them. This incident led the Indians to take to the warpath. Trading posts and small settlements were attacked, stage lines raided, relay stations destroyed, and emigrants' wagons burned. But no attack was made on Fort Laramie, although it was seriously undermanned.

Following these incidents a period of comparative peace ensued in the Fort Laramie region. The post, though held by fewer than 100 men during most of the War between the States, was not attacked by the Indians, whose hostile efforts were largely ineffective because of their lack of unity and good generalship. However, on several occasions stage stations were burned, emigrants and travelers were molested, horses were stolen, and in Colorado there were serious outbreaks. Meanwhile, to the north of Fort Laramie the influx of population into Montana and Idaho following the discovery of gold there led to a demand for a new wagon road leaving the main trail near Fort Laramie, proceeding down the Powder River, and then going west to the Bozeman mines. This proposed road, known as the Bozeman Trail, infuriated the Sioux, whose great chief, Red Cloud, refused to consent to its establishment since it was to run through the center of their last great hunting reserve. Fort Laramie, then the headquarters of the army district of the Platte, was the center of military operations in 1865 and 1866. Indian raids on wagon trains and travelers in the immediate vicinity of the fort were climaxed in July 1865 by the slaughter of Sergeant Custard and 25 of his men. Three columns of 2,500 men were sent out in what is known as the Powder River Expedition. Its purpose was to punish the Indians north of Fort Laramie. From its beginning, however, the success of the expedition was rendered difficult by inadequate maps, poor guides, rough terrain, and lack of food. Early in the fall it returned to Fort Laramie, having failed to achieve its objective.

In June 1866, peace commissioners of the United

States met with some 2,000 Sioux and Cheyennes at Fort Laramie to secure their consent to the building of the Bozeman Trail. In the midst of the conference, 2,000 troops under orders to open the Bozeman Trail and erect forts along it appeared, and Red Cloud and his tribesmen, resentful of this show of armed might, withdrew. The remaining Indians then reluctantly signed the treaty providing for the opening of the new road, and as a reward were given the gifts dear to the Indian heart. Meanwhile the Bozeman Trail troops had begun construction of Fort Phil Kearny at the foot of the Big Horn Mountains. Fearful that their old way of life would be rendered impossible with the white man's penetration, Red Cloud's band kept the troops in a state of virtual siege. Wagon and wood trains were ambushed, wood cutters were assaulted, and all but armed traffic stopped. The worst incident occurred on December 21, when Capt. W. J. Fetterman and 80 men from Fort Phil Kearny were ambushed while protecting a wood train and killed to a man.

The Fetterman Massacre left the fort with a reduced garrison and clearly in grave danger. Fort Laramie, their principal base, was more than 230 miles distant, but it must be reached if the essential supplies and troops to withstand an assault were to be secured. In bitter cold and with a blizzard raging, John Phillips,<sup>9</sup> veteran scout, set out on an historic ride to secure help before disaster overtook the garrison at the hands of the exultant Indians. As he arrived at the fort late on Christmas night, his horse fell dead. A dance was in progress at Old Bedlam, but news of the tragedy stopped the holiday celebration and preparations for a relief expedition were made immediately. In temperatures often below zero, the relieving troops made their way northward. The arrival of reinforcements eliminated serious danger, but no decisive blow could be struck at the Sioux.

The outstanding military event of 1867 was the Wagon Box engagement of August 2, in which the military escort for wood cutters from Fort Phil Kearny repelled one attack after another. Meanwhile the troops at this fort and at Forts Reno and C. F. Smith, also on the Bozeman Trail, were practically besieged.

In November a new peace commission came to Fort Laramie to negotiate with the northern plains Indians, but Red Cloud's hostile bands refused to attend as long as the forts on the Bozeman Trail

were not abandoned. The conference was therefore a failure, but in the following April, Red Cloud consented to come to a new meeting. The American commissioners then offered to abandon the Bozeman Trail and its defending forts. But, suspicious of white men's promises, Red Cloud refused to sign the suggested treaty until its provisions had been actually executed. In August, Fort Phil Kearny was abandoned, and the triumphant Sioux immediately put it to the torch. Three months later, Red Cloud signed the treaty. By its terms the land above the North Platte River and east of the Big Horn Mountains was regarded as unceded territory. All the present South Dakota west of the Missouri was to be a reservation on which Sioux were to settle down and live by farming and on rations supplied by the Government, rather than by hunting. The treaty marked the end of Fort Laramie as the great trade center of the Sioux. Under its terms the post lay outside the country of the Sioux, who were consequently forbidden to come to the fort.

Comparative peace once more came to the Fort Laramie region and lasted until 1875 and 1876, when the gold rush to the Black Hills, located in the Sioux Reservation, brought hundreds of white men from the Colorado country to the fort where they stopped on their way to Dakota. For a short time the post was also a station on the route of the Deadwood-Cheyenne stage line. White men having violated the Fort Laramie treaty of 1868 by their rush to the Indian lands in the Black Hills, hostilities broke out with the rebellious nonreservation Indians under Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, and the fort became a base for military operations against the Sioux in their last great stand against the inevitable victory of the white man's civilization.

The Indian menace was now really over, but the frontier, terrorized by temporary Indian successes like the spectacular Custer Massacre, demanded that Fort Laramie be strengthened. The Federal Government, believing the need existed, reinforced the post and constructed many new permanent buildings. From its beginning as a military post, the number of buildings had been steadily growing. By 1867 there were 43 structures. Now new construction raised the number until, in 1885, there were 65. But the need for such a large military base was rapidly passing. The Indian was at last defeated; new posts scat-

tered throughout the West rendered Fort Laramie less and less important; the use of railroads and new roads for purposes of travel and transportation made the post no longer a vital supply center for travelers and freighters; and the country about Fort Laramie was gradually being settled in the late 1870's and early 1880's. Ranches were established and white men and cattle replaced Indians and buffaloes on the Wyoming plains. The garrison at Fort Laramie, therefore, became primarily a law-enforcement agency. It escorted stages and gold shipments and arrested cattle rustlers and highwaymen. But, by 1889, it was obvious that the fort no longer served an essential military function, and orders were given for its abandonment. The following spring the last troops departed.

The passing of Fort Laramie symbolized the passing also of the American frontier. For almost 60 years the old post had seen the pageant of the West as it swept on to the conquest of the continent. Trapper, trader, explorer, fortune seeker, soldier, sportsman, miner, cowboy, settler—each of these had tarried at the fort and gone on his way to make his contribution to the building of America. The abandonment of the old fort signified that a mighty chapter in the American epic had been finally written. The hopes and the opportunities offered to America by western expansion existed no longer. But the heritage of faith in freedom and equality of opportunity that the frontier had fostered still lived. Although new and serious problems of social, economic, and political adjustment were to rise as a result of the end of the frontier, these could be solved if Americans but retained the faith, the hope, and the resolution that characterized their pioneer forebears.

### *Fort Laramie Today*

SIXTEEN OF THE FORMER BUILDINGS of Fort Laramie have survived. Of these, Old Bedlam, used at various times as officers' quarters, post headquarters, and social center, is outstanding in interest. It is the sole survival of the post's original buildings. Immortalized in Capt. Charles King's historical novel, *Laramie, or the Queen of Bedlam*, which vividly recreated the life of the fort, Old Bedlam recalls its past as does no other structure at the post.

Another interesting old building is the sutler's store, center of most of the trading done at Fort





*The Cavalry Barracks.*

Laramie after it became a military post. The sutler was a licensed trader, and from him soldiers, Indians, and emigrants bought needed supplies. The store was built in the early days of Government control of the fort and is one of the oldest buildings in Wyoming. The old guardhouse stands by the Laramie River. Bars are still in the windows, and a heavy wooden door leading to the steel-lined dungeon still creaks on its hinges. Among the other remaining buildings are the cavalry barracks and the hospital. Excavated foundations reveal the location of various buildings on the old parade ground.

Efforts to preserve all these structures were begun about 1915, and in 1937 the State of Wyoming purchased the site of the fort. The following year it was donated to the Federal Government which proclaimed the historic area a national monument to be administered by the Department of the Interior through the National Park Service. There are 214 acres in the national monument and these effectively protect all visible evidence of the old fort. The National Park Service has long-range plans to preserve the present buildings in order that they may be a permanent memorial to an important phase of frontier history. Plans call for the establishment of a museum to tell the eventful story of the post. At present a small temporary museum is open without charge.

### *Allied Sites of Interest*

FORT LARAMIE NATIONAL MONUMENT is closely allied with Scotts Bluff National Monument in

western Nebraska, 60 miles away, an important landmark on the Oregon Trail. The graves of thousands of pioneers remain hidden and unknown along the route of the Oregon Trail, but a number which are marked can be found in the vicinity of the fort.

Ten miles from Fort Laramie is Register Cliff on which hundreds of pioneer names are carved on the chalklike substances of the cliff's clay. A day's wagon drive away from Fort Laramie, this was a favorite camping place for pioneers. One of those pioneers, Milton Estes, inscribed his name there in 1859 while on his way to the Colorado Rockies, where Rocky Mountain National Park is now located, and Estes Park Village which was named for his father, Joel Estes.

A crude cross marks the site of the Grattan Massacre, 8 miles east of the monument.

Easy to observe are the old wagon tracks which wore so deeply into the Oregon Trail that the elements have not yet removed them. Near Guernsey, Wyo., are wagon ruts cut nearly 3 feet deep by the thousands of oxen-pulled wagons which crossed the plains.

Fort Laramie National Monument is located 3 miles west of the town of Fort Laramie, Wyo., and U. S. Highway No. 26. It is under the immediate supervision of a custodian. For additional information address: Custodian, Fort Laramie National Monument, Fort Laramie, Wyo.

# Fort Laramie National Monument

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



## Legend

- EXISTING BUILDING
- RUINS
- FOUNDATIONS
- BOUNDARY
- ROAD
- SWAMP
- TREES AND BRUSH

200 100 0 200 400  
GRAPHIC SCALE

